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SECDEF FOR FATA AND BEIN, DEPT FOR EUR (DICARLO), D
(SMITH), P (BAME), EUR/SCE (HOH, SAINZ, FOOKS) AND EUR/RPM
(BROTZEN), NSC FOR BRAUN, USNATO FOR REID, UNDERWOOD,
SHAFFER, EUCOM FOR MAJOR GENERAL CATTO, USAFE FOR MAJOR
GENERAL FLETCHER, USAREUR FOR BG PERKINS

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SUBJECT: BOSNIA: EAGLE BASE TRANSFER CEREMONY MARKS NEW ERA
IN RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BOSNIA AND THE UNITED STATES

¶1. (SBU) Summary. The return of Eagle Base in Tuzla to the authority of Bosnia-Herzegovina was marked in a poignant ceremony at the facility on June 30. The ceremony focused on the essential contributions to peace and security of the approximately 100,000 U.S. servicemen and women who served in Bosnia since 1995. The ceremony also marked the beginning of a new era for Bosnia, as the transfer of Eagle Base signaled that for the first time in modern history, the country was capable of providing for its own security. End summary.

¶2. (U) The Bosnian Ministry of Defense and the Embassy jointly organized a transfer ceremony recognizing the return of Eagle Base in Tuzla to Bosnia in June 30. Eagle Base, the prime U.S. military facility in Bosnia since 1995, will be used by both the new Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina and as a civilian airport facility. The return of the facility and prior U.S. military drawdown were driven by Bosnia's success in implementing comprehensive defense reforms, merging the two former warring entity armies and establishing a state-level Ministry of Defense.

¶3. (U) Bosnian President Nebojsa Radmanovic, President Haris Silajdzic, Defense Minister Selmo Cikotic, CHOD LTG Sifet Podzic and other high level officials attended the ceremony with the Ambassador, National Guard Bureau Commander LTG H. Steven Blum and other senior U.S. military representatives. The ceremony, held on the airfield at Eagle Base, consisted of a flyover by U.S. Air Force F-16 fighters, speeches by President Radmanovic, Minister Cikotic, the Ambassador and LTG Blum, a signing of a memorandum transferring authority for the base and the lowering of the American flag followed by the raising of the Bosnian flag over the facility.

¶4. (U) A key theme of the ceremony reflected in all speeches was the successful conclusion of the U.S. military mission in Bosnia and the lasting contributions of the United States Armed Forces in establishing peace and security in the country following a horrific war. President Radmanovic in his opening remarks expressed "in the name of all citizens of

Bosnia and Herzegovina, thank you" to U.S. soldiers who served in Bosnia. Minister Cikotic, speaking in English as a sign of respect for Bosnia's "closest friend," said that the United States military had allowed Bosnia to reach the doorstep of NATO and thanked U.S. servicemen and servicewomen for their 12 years of service in the country.

¶5. (U) The ceremony also underscored that while our relationship is changing, the United States will continue to play a leading role in Bosnia as the country further integrates into Euro-Atlantic institutions. President Radmanovic noted that the U.S. military drawdown was a signal of Bosnia's success in implementing defense reform and providing for its own security, but the foundation of our bilateral relationship remained strong. Minister Cikotic stated that Bosnia remains on the path to full NATO integration, and now looks to the United States as its alliance partner, not security provider. In his own remarks that received wide press coverage, the Ambassador noted that "we see a future for this country in a united Europe, with an American friend always at its side."

COMMENT: A MISSION COMPLETE

¶6. (SBU) In an otherwise bleak political climate here, the Eagle Base transfer ceremony was an important reminder that our project in Bosnia has achieved substantial, lasting successes that go well beyond our early military and diplomatic efforts to end a war. The images of the ceremony itself, particularly the emotional lowering of our colors and raising of the Bosnian state flag to the country's national anthem, serve to demonstrate that the United States has accomplished its military mission here. Other key signs of progress that would have been unthinkable a decade earlier

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were also on clear display at the ceremony. The Bosnian-Serb President stood and publicly thanked the United States for its military intervention in Bosnia and lead role in stabilizing the country. The new, multi-ethnic Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina that took control of the facility has allowed Bosnia to become an exporter not importer of global security and finds itself on the doorstep of NATO. The heads of other state-level institutions created with substantial U.S. resources were on hand for the ceremony. Above all, the key role that the United States has played and continues to play in creating a peaceful, stable and democratic society was reaffirmed.

A NOTE OF THANKS

¶7. (U) We wish to express our sincere gratitude to all those from the United States Armed Forces who were able to join us for the ceremony, particularly LTG Steven Blum, MajGen William Catto, Maj Gen Paul Fletcher, BG David Perkins, and NATO HQ Sarajevo Commander MG Richard Wightman. Our special thanks also goes out to EUCOM, USAREUR, and USAFE for their substantial assistance with the ceremony, and for arranging the orderly and transparent transfer of Eagle Base.
MCELHANEY